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TWO
LETTERS
ON THE LATE
APPLICATIONS TO PARLIAMENT
BY THE
Protestant Dissenting Ministers :

ONE,
AN ADDRESS to the DISSENTING LAITY on
the Subject of those APPLICATIONS.

THE OTHER,
AN ENQUIRY into the LAWFULNESS of the
DECLARATION proposed to be substituted in
the room of Subscription to the ARTICLES of
the CHURCH of ENGLAND.

By JOSHUA TOULMIN, A. M.

*Avidius Quietus, qui me unice dilexit, et, quo non minus
gaudeo, probavit, ut multa alia Thraseæ (fuit enim fami-
liaris) ita hoc sæpe referebat, præcipere solitum suscipien-
das esse causas aut amicorum, aut destitutas, aut ad exem-
plum pertinentes.*

PLINII EPIST.

L O N D O N :

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The Motto of the Title Page translated.

Avidius Quietus, whose affection, and (what I equally value) whose approbation I had the happiness to enjoy, used frequently to repeat this maxim, among others, of his Friend *Thrasea's*; That "there are
" three sorts of causes which we ought to undertake;
" those of our Friends, those of the deserted, and
" those which tend to public Example."

Melmoth's Pliny.

Besides some inaccuracies in the punctuation, the following more material Errata have been observed, which the Reader is desired to correct.

Page 19, l. 13. for succors read succours.

23, l. 12. for that, read them.

31, l. 19. for full, read free.

35, l. 3 and 4. for the Senate read that House.

43, l. 1. the * refers to the quotation in page 42.

43, l. 16. after good spirit, add as the present.

49, l. 8. after history, put an interrogation?

l. 23. for ABRAHAM read ABRAHAM.

43-3-3-61



TO THE COMMITTEE,
WHO CONDUCTED
THE APPLICATIONS OF THE
DISSENTING MINISTERS
TO PARLIAMENT;
AS A TESTIMONY
OF HIS GRATEFUL SENSE
OF THEIR GENEROSITY AND ZEAL
IN THAT BUSINESS,
THE FOLOWING LETTERS ARE,
WITH ALL RESPECT,
D E D I C A T E D,
BY THEIR
OBLIGED HUMBLE SERVANT,
AND AFFECTIONATE BROTHER,

Taunton, Nov. 17, 1773.

THE AUTHOR.

TO THE COMMITTEE

AND

THE ASSOCIATION OF THE

DISSENTING MINISTERS

TO PARLIAMENT.

IN A TESTIMONY

OF HIS GRATITUDE

OF THEIR GENEROSITY AND ZEAL

IN THAT BUSINESS.

THE FOLLOWING LETTERS ARE

WITH ALL RESPECT,

D E D I C A T E D.

BY THEIR

WILLIAM HENRY

AND ASSOCIATED BROTHERS.

THE ASSOCIATION OF THE DISSENTING MINISTERS.

L E T T E R I.

GENTLEMEN,

IT is not to be supposed that you are strangers to that just and noble description our Lord gives of the nature of his religion, when he declares before the tribunal of Pilate; “ *my kingdom is not of this world.*” Its *Origin* was divine and heavenly. Other Sovereigns have marked their way to a throne with conquests and blood, or at least hold their crowns by the more peaceable titles and claims of hereditary right, or the choice of a free people: but Christ became a Prince and King, not through blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but by God. The *Plan* of this kingdom was formed in the counsels of the eternal mind, e’er the world began,

B

and

and its erection and establishment was the sole work of God.—In the *Nature* of its laws and sanctions it is not of this world: the former are directed to other and sublimer views, than what constitute the objects of human legislature; and the latter are derived, not from fines, imprisonment, and death, the instruments men employ to secure obedience, but from the glory and terrors of a future, unseen state. It did not owe its *Introduction* amongst men to the arts of policy, the intrigues of the cabinet, or the schemes of ambition; to the offers of honour and wealth, or the terror of heavy penalties, or to civil commotions and insurrections. Nor did Christ and his apostles attempt to secure, on their side, a combination of the lower ranks of the people, or to make a powerful interest among the servants, who in those times were *slaves*, by exciting them, with offers of assistance, from the influence of their authority and miracles, to rise and attempt the recovery of their liberty. Our Lord
 adopted

adopted, indeed, *no worldly method* of planting his Gospel : though never any one possessed *so many advantages* and opportunities for *first forming a worldly kingdom*, and *then* incorporating his religion with his government ; such were his knowledge of the hearts of men, a power of working miracles at pleasure, a command over all nature, and the biases and inclinations of the Jewish people towards an earthly kingdom : these were advantages an aspiring mind might easily have converted to the purposes of ambition and power. But Christ waved and disclaimed every thing of that kind.

His kingdom was not of this world : yet his disciples, in after ages, as if they knew better than their master how to advance the interest of his religion, have employed the sword to spread it, and the sceptre to support it. They have formed *a close alliance* betwixt his church and the state ; have distinguished the ministers of his religion from its common professors, not by their superior

knowledge and purity of character, but by holy orders, revenues, and honours, and have restrained the Gospel by human penalties. In modern Christianity the magistrate is made the head of the church : the teachers of it are the *ministers of the state*; and, as if it was the intention to supersede the future judgment of Christ another day, his disciples are already rewarded or punished according as they receive, or reject the Gospel when modelled by the will of man. Nay, the time was, when the magistrate, from love to the souls of his subjects, would burn their bodies, and would sooner lose all the services of a useful member of the community, than that he should live in the belief of a different faith from his own. In our times, these cruel and impolitic exertions of power, for the sake of Christ, are disclaimed, at least in protestant countries. Yet, even in the present day, Christianity continues incorporated with the state; and the state, if it does not *draw the sword*, employs the *terror*
of

of its edicts to limit and restrain the profession of it. All Christians enjoy not that equal claim, their merit as citizens should give them, to the emoluments and advantages of the government they live under. Many are excluded from all posts of honour and profit, merely on account of their religious sentiments ; and some are exposed to the execution of severe and cruel laws. If the *former* are contented, seeking their happiness in the knowledge and profession of the truth, and in the expectation of the honours of the great day, to fill only spheres of inferior respect and usefulness in the community ; there is no reason to be urged why the *latter* should not seek a redress of the grievances they lie under, and use every dutiful measure to obtain legal security and protection.

You will suppose, I refer to the case of DISSENTING MINISTERS, who, according to the present laws, are liable to suffer by heavy penalties, unless they subscribe to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England ; and to that of DISSENTING

SCHOOL-MASTERS, who, under the sanction of as severe statutes, are obliged to declare that they will conform to the Liturgy, and frequent the divine service, established by the laws of these kingdoms. They have both, with pain, long seen themselves exposed to the effects of these rigorous edicts, and at length attempts have been made in renewed applications to Parliament for the relief of both. That these applications have been made, and what has been the success of them, you are not indeed to be informed. The affair hath been transacted in a public manner, and the progress and circumstances of it have been, from time to time, laid before you, in the public channels of News. My intention, therefore, cannot be to offer you any information on these heads; but to address you, as persons who have been witnesses to, and interested in, these transactions. Some reflections have undoubtedly suggested themselves to your minds relative to this occasion; which it may be thought needless to mention, as being in themselves too obvious to escape

escape

escape your notice : yet perhaps their weight and usefulness may be deemed an apology for attempting to place them in a light, that may cherish and strengthen the impressions they leave. Permit me then, with great respect and real affection, to submit to your judgment and candour some considerations, that have this tendency and design.

The *Object* of this application, Gentlemen, was truly important. The *immediate object* of it was to obtain legal security for such Dissenting Ministers, as cannot conscientiously comply with the terms of toleration, and for those who are concerned in the education of youth, and cannot conform to the liturgy and service of the Church of England. Oppressive laws exist against such, and severe penalties are threatened. Laws which, if executed, would, for a time, confine us, who are ministers, to a prison, absolutely banish us from the place of our former residence, in most instances ruin, and in all silence us : laws, which do not allow the indulgence of a

Bail, tempt, by the prospect of interest, the malevolent, busy, and mercenary, to lay an information, require the Justice to record such a deposition, upon oath, against us for preaching, and constitute this record a conviction of the offender *. The very mention of the purport

* The laws enact, that dissenting ministers shall
 “ not come, or be, unless in passing upon the road,
 “ within five miles of any city, town corporate, or
 “ borough, that sends burgesses to parliament; or
 “ within five miles of any parish, town, or place,
 “ where they have taken upon them to preach;
 “ upon forfeiture, for every such offence, of the
 “ sum of forty pounds; one third to the King, another
 “ third to the poor of the Parish, and another
 “ to him that shall sue for it; and if such a person
 “ keep a school, he shall forfeit likewise for every
 “ such offence, forty pounds; and any two Justices
 “ of the peace may, upon oath made of any of these
 “ offences, commit such offender for six months,
 “ without bail, or mainprize. They are also liable,
 “ on conviction, upon oath of two witnesses, before
 “ one or more Justices of the peace, of having
 “ preached; for the first offence to a penalty of
 “ twenty pounds; and for every such offence
 “ afterwards, to a penalty of forty pounds. And,
 “ by another act, for every such offence, they are
 “ liable to suffer three months imprisonment, in the
 “ common

purport and tendency of these laws is sufficient to shew the importance of the object our application had in view : it was no less than the repeal of such cruel edicts, and placing us on a footing that might offer nothing to raise our fears, nor afford a possibility of suffering. At present our safety and ease are owing only to *Connivance*. Connivance is but a *temporary relaxation* of tyranny and persecution ; the connivance we enjoy, though it may make us easy as to the inclination of the magistrate, still leaves us exposed to the bigotry, malice, and avarice of the lowest of the people, and the administrator of justice, upon any person's

“ *common jail, without bail or mainprize.* And every
 “ time they administer the Lord's Supper, they are
 “ liable to a penalty of one hundred pounds ; one
 “ moiety to the king, another moiety to be divided
 “ between the poor of the parish, and such person
 “ or persons as shall sue for the same by action of
 “ debt, bill, plaint, or information, in any court
 “ of record, wherein no essoin, protection, or
 “ wager of law shall be allowed.”—See the Case of
 Protestant Dissenting Ministers and School-masters :
 or any of the Vindications of the Application to Par-
 liament.

offering

offering to make deposition on oath
 against us, is under an obligation and
 necessity to receive it, and punish us; to
punish us it is not proper to say, where
 there is no guilt: rather, he is necessi-
 tated *unrighteously* to harass us, to dis-
 tress us in violation of equity and huma-
 nity, though under the sanction of law,
 and in a protestant land to persecute the
most genuine Protestants. In this case,
 what do we ask? Only that the law may
 protect, where it now leaves us ob-
 noxious to danger and suffering, and
 that the magistrate may be saved from
 the cruel necessity of inflicting penalties
 and calamities on those, whom, as a
 magistrate of Britain, we suppose, he
 will deem it his duty and felicity to de-
 fend in the undisturbed enjoyment of
 their rights. In the present situation of
 things, the toleration is not *complete*,
 and we are not in possession of our *full*,
natural rights. If exempted from suffer-
 ing, we are left to *fear*, and, if not ac-
 tually fined and imprisoned, we are in
danger of both. Is this a condition, in
 which

which a prudent, ingenuous and liberal mind can acquiesce? A man, who is not indifferent to the rights, with which the author of nature hath invested him, and who knows that conscience ought to be left in the enjoyment of perfect freedom and ease, will seek something more than a partial toleration, or liberty by connivance. It is a just and commendable object of his wishes and pursuits, that it may not be in the power of others to abridge his rights; and that, if laws are in being which threaten his liberty and security, they may not be forgotten merely through the lenity of the times, but repealed and abolished. In this view, the end of our application was desirable and important: if it is at all a matter of moment not to have the freedom of our persons, and the possession of our property, lie at mercy and discretion.

But what I chiefly mean by the importance of the object is the *aspect it has on the cause of religious liberty at large*, and that of pure Christianity. The
prayer

prayer of the petition could not have
 been obtained without a *general* happy
 influence. The truth of the matter is,
 (though it is a melancholy truth, and
 what some may not be willing to hear)
 “ that all the ecclesiastical powers of the
 “ Christian world have left the true,
 “ pure, simple religion; and teach
 “ for doctrines the commandments of
 “ men. They are all (says a learned
 “ and excellent writer in the Church of
 “ England) merchants of the earth,
 “ and have set up a kingdom of this
 “ world, abounding in riches, tempo-
 “ ral power, and external pomp. They
 “ have all a dogmatizing spirit, and
 “ persecute such as do not receive their
 “ own mark, and worship the image
 “ which they have set up. They all ne-
 “ glect Christ’s command of *preaching*
 “ *the gospel to all nations*, and even that
 “ of going to the *lost sheep of the house*
 “ *of Israel*, there being innumerable
 “ multitudes in all Christian countries,
 “ who have never been taught to read,
 “ and who are in other respects also,
 “ destitute

“ destitute of the means of saving know-
 “ ledge. It is very true, that the
 “ Church of *Rome* is *Babylon the Great*,
 “ and *the mother of harlots, and of the*
 “ *abominations of the earth*. But all the
 “ rest have copied her example, more or
 “ less. They have all received money,
 “ like *Gebazi*, and therefore the le-
 “ prosy of *Naaman* will cleave to them,
 “ and to their seed for ever *.” Unless
 they correct and reform, and return to
 pure Christianity. And is it speaking
 in too high terms, is it speaking beyond
 the truth of the importance of the late
 application, that its success would have
 been the *beginning* of a further reforma-
 tion, a *step* towards the restoration of
 the simplicity and authority of the gos-
 pel? Our personal protection and secu-
 rity would, undoubtedly, have been
 the direct and more immediate effect
 of it: but it would have reached
 further, it promised more. A more
 enlarged and liberal toleration would

* Hartley's Observation on Man, V. II. p. 370.

have

have taken place, than hath yet been known in these kingdoms. There would have been a further abolition of the restraints and discouragements, that have been so detrimental to the cause of liberty and truth. The declaration proposed to be accepted in the room of subscription to the articles of the Church of England runs in this form : “ I
 “ A. B. do declare, as in the presence
 “ of Almighty God, that I am a Christian and a Protestant ; and that as
 “ such I do receive the revelation of the
 “ will of God, contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament,
 “ as the rule of my faith and practice.” Had our petition been heard, and this declaration admitted, a point of material consequence to genuine Christianity would have been secured. For human explications of the doctrine of Christ would have lost, in a great measure, their power : it might have been said, that *for once Christianity was established*, which hitherto has not been so much as tolerated. The gospel would have been
 so

so far fet free from the burthen of human articles, inforced by human threats and worldly sanctions. This, in *its tendency*, could not but have been favourable to the cause of truth, and religious liberty at large. It would have been a step towards an universal toleration, an advance made towards the total abolition of the force of human determinations about the truths of God's word. This would have rendered future endeavours to set the consciences of Christians, in the concerns of religion, free from the decisions and authority of men, more easy and practicable. Posterity would have had less to do; the enlargement of liberty would have invited them to use further efforts in this good cause, and raised flattering hopes of greater success. However, for the present, these pleasing prospects are cut off, and these generous hopes are blasted. If this tendency, and these consequences of our being heard, did not escape the foresight of that sacred bench, who had a principal influence in the rejection of
our

our bill : if they even put a negative upon our prayer, in order to prevent and discourage further attempts in the good work of reformation, in the glorious cause of Christian Liberty * : if this was

* It was a notable observation of a wise Father, and no less ingenuously confessed ; “ That those
“ which held and persuaded pressure of consciences,
“ were commonly interested therein themselves for
“ their own ends.” *Lord Bacon’s Essays*, p. 11.

“ All who are interested in the support of the an-
“ tichristian establishments, which usurp an undue au-
“ thority over the consciences of men, and whose
“ wealth and power are advanced by them, are at
“ this very time in a state of general consternation,
“ both at home and abroad ; seeing their principles
“ and maxims universally decried, and their unjust
“ claims assailed from a great variety of quarters, so
“ that *their kingdom is now full of darkness, and they*
“ *are gnawing their tongues for pain, but without re-*
“ *penting of their deeds,* Rev. xvi. 10. And we are
“ authorized, my brethren, by the spirit which fore-
“ told both this corruption of Christianity, and the
“ restoration of it from this deplorably corrupted state,
“ to enjoy their confusion and distress ; and, toge-
“ ther with the powers of heaven, and *the holy apa-*
“ *stles and prophets,* to rejoice at the fall of this *mysti-*
“ *cal Babylon,* since it is *God that avengeth us of her,*”
Rev. xviii. 20. *Dr. Priestley’s Farewel Sermon at*
Leeds, p. 37, 38.

the

the case, then——*non audeo totum dicere.*

“ When it so happens, that persons in
 “ high stations in the church (*i. e.* of
 “ Christ) have their eyes enlightened,
 “ and see the corruptions and deficiencies
 “ of it, they must incur the prophetic
 “ censures in the highest degree, if they
 “ still concur; nay, if they do not en-
 “ deavour to reform and purge out these
 “ defilements.”—“ The corrupt gover-
 “ nors of the several churches will ever
 “ oppose the true Gospel, and in so doing
 “ will bring ruin upon themselves *.

However, though success has not crowned our endeavours, the *excellency of our Principles*, and of our Cause, has been more conspicuously manifested, and fully displayed by this Application. No set of people, perhaps, have been more unfortunate with respect to the opinion entertained of them by their fellow Christians. We have been regarded as an inconsiderable sect, whose judg-

* Hartley's Observations on Man, p. 371.
 Vol. II.

ment was weak, their minds destitute of a liberal taste, and their manners tinctured with enthusiasm, or formed by hypocrisy.

But we have, in the late transactions enjoyed this felicity, that they have given us an opportunity to explain and hold up our principles to the public consideration. They have, of course, introduced some of our ministers to the acquaintance and conversation of the learned and the great, and have given occasion to vindications of our petition, that will do honour to the writers and the cause. The grounds of our application, which are the same with our leading and distinguishing principles, have been set in different points of view. One writer, in a clear and solid piece, hath investigated the *principles of Toleration*. Another, with equal good sense, hath, in a judicious essay, more fully illustrated *its extent, as well as the arguments* on which it depends. Others have, in a strain of close reasoning, and spirited address, supported the equity of our petition, and displayed

displayed the nature of our principles. All have discovered a liberal mind and a candid spirit, and have in general tempered the warmth of their apologies with delicacy and politeness. Whilst they have written like men pleading for their rights, they have not forgot the respect due to their superiors. They have written like men, who were conscious they were writing on the side of truth, and therefore did not need to have recourse to artifice, asperity, and bitterness, the succors of a bad cause. The proofs of this are before the Public, and I am greatly mistaken, if their suffrage will not support my assertions. Such a method of writing certainly bespeaks, and illustrates the excellence of the principles explained and defended. This is the dress, in which truth loves to appear. It is remarkable, that though a variety of pieces have been drawn up on the same question, which one would think was too plain and obvious to admit of much discussion; yet something new has been advanced, or the subject

has been set in a different light by every author, and has certainly received no small advantage from being placed in many different points of view; yet a beautiful uniformity and agreement in the same general principles has been visible throughout all. Though these publications have been penned by gentlemen, whose sentiments on the particular doctrines of Christianity have been supposed greatly to vary from one another: one heart has united them here; the same devout attachment to the sole authority of Christ, the same generous regards to the rights of conscience have dictated their arguments, and glowed in their addresses. Doth not this indicate a real excellency in our principles? Here is an harmony and simplicity to which error is a stranger. It appears, that they admit of being proposed in the most advantageous manner, and of being set in such various lights as may be fit for the convincing of all, and for heightening the assurance of each. The prejudices imbibed against the petition, and the ob-
jections

jections that have been urged by different persons, and from different motives, have proved the solidity and strength of our cause. It hath really gained by opposition, and, like genuine gold, appears the purer for being tried. There is not that uncertainty about our principles, as subsists in the church of England about the design of its subscription, and the sense of its articles. Our principles are *simple and divine*, included in the words, and built on the authority of our great Lawgiver, *viz.* “ *That one is our Master, even Christ.*” In the words of a noble Peer, “ We contend for a *Scripture Creed* and *Scripture Worship*; whilst, in the Church of England, they have a *Calvinistical Creed*, a *popish Liturgy*, and *Arminian preaching.*” Our principles are evidently calculated to preserve the authority of divine Revelation, and to give it that weight it ought to have in all religious concerns, that of being our only guide and rule. Upon our principles, that honour and submission is paid

to the sacred Scriptures that is due to them, as containing a discovery of the divine will and counsels, as supported by the sanction of Miracles, and speaking to us in the Name of God. Divine Truth is thus left to shine by its own, not a borrowed light; to display its native splendor, unfulled by human weakness, unobscured by clouds of error; and to prevail and overcome opposition by the force of pure evidence.

“ ACONTIUS, in his seventh book of
 “ the Stratagems of Satan, hath this
 “ observation, That in the Jewish
 “ Church, pious Princes often restored
 “ the Jewish worship to its primitive
 “ purity, not by making a new confession of their faith, but *always* by
 “ reading the scriptures to the people;
 “ and *thus* they abolished all the footsteps of idolatry and superstition. And
 “ why, says he, should we think our
 “ wisdom greater than the wisdom of
 “ those religious Kings whose proceedings God so well approved of. For,
 “ says he further, What we Christians
 “ once

“ once admit as part of the confession
 “ of our faith, we cleave so stiffly to,
 “ that we choose rather to offer violence
 “ to the word of God, than suffer such
 “ *opinions* to be contradicted. And so
 “ we make the *words* of men of more
 “ authority than is the word of God.
 “ Therefore, in my judgment, saith he,
 “ we had best *all* return to the Scrip-
 “ tures themselves, to which every party
 “ appeals for the support of their own
 “ opinions, and make that *alone* the
 “ symbol of agreement. Every other
 “ scheme of uniting fails us—this can-
 “ not *.” The very Application, of
 which I am speaking, furnishes an ex-
 ample of the excellency of our principles
 in this respect. On this large bottom
 of the authority of Scripture, *nine*
hundred Dissenting Ministers have united
 in the same design: but if any particu-
 lar Explication, or set of Articles had
 been proposed as a substitute for the

* An Attempt to explain the words, Reason,
 Substance, &c. p. 207.

thirty-nine Articles, it would have produced disputes, caused divisions, and destroyed the spirit of harmony and friendship, that hath so generally subsisted amongst the whole body through the kingdom, as well as, in particular, amongst those to whom the management of the application was committed. When the Scriptures come to be regarded by every one in practice, and not in words only, as the sole Rule of our Faith, and Christ Jesus as our sole Master and Head, we may promise ourselves (such is the tendency of our principles) truth will be more easily found out, and pure religion be much more prevalent. The views of a party will then yield to the interests of Christianity; and the desire of proselyting to our faith will give way to a more liberal and Christian desire of leading men to study freely, and obey uniformly the Gospel of our common Lord and Saviour *. This, with truth and virtue,

* Ce qui perpétue le schisme parmi les Protestans, c'est que les Théologiens aiment mieux avoir des disciples

tue, would diffuse candor, peace, and love.

When such are our principles, is it surprizing, that, whilst our cause hath been in agitation, it hath gained new advocates : that the justice and equity of the Bill hath been clearly discerned and more generally acknowledged ; and that our characters, as friends to the rights of conscience, and as men of integrity in the profession of religion, have procured applause ? It hath been seen, that let our principles be embraced, and have their influence, every man will worship his Creator unmolested, and every man profess his sentiments uncensured and unthreatened. It hath been seen, that we are no friends to the policy, which would support religion by insincerity, and maintain a reverence, in appearance, for articles, which, in deed and in truth, are doubted and disclaimed. It hath been seen, that we can not suffer our hands to subscribe what our hearts

disciples que d'en donner à Jesus-Christ. MRS
PENSEES, p. 138.

do

do not cordially approve ; nor allow ourselves to avow from the desk, in the presence of God and the congregation, as our faith, what we shall esteem it a duty to Truth to contradict and confute from the pulpit. It hath been seen, that our principles are most friendly to mankind, and honourable to Christianity. Hence they have been adopted and urged with the power of eloquence, and the weight of exalted ranks in the great Senate of the Nation. Reason and Piety have espoused and supported them. May we not consider these things as a presumption, as a proof of the authority and excellence they possess ? Do they not rise, Gentlemen, in your esteem, when you see the new advocates they have gained over, and the honourable countenance they have received ? Could falsehood have stood the inspection of such judges ? And could weak uninteresting principles have gone on to convince, and obtain patrons, uninfluenced by the open approbation of Government, and against the weight of Prelacy ? We may be allowed

lowed surely to triumph, if not in the grant of our prayer, yet in the native excellency and power of the grounds on which we act. We may be allowed, if not to celebrate the success of our Petition, yet to cry out, GREAT IS THE TRUTH, AND MIGHTY ABOVE ALL THINGS.

Another reflection suggested by the late application to Parliament, is the *unhappy influence the interposition of human edicts and sanctions has on religion*. When the profession of Christianity at large, or the reception of particular modes and opinions in religion, is recommended by the offers of worldly advantages and emoluments, and enforced by worldly penalties; such constitutions tempt men to make a *gain of godliness*, and draw off the thoughts from the only genuine and acceptable motives to religion, those that arise from a regard to the authority and favour of the Almighty. The appeal may be lodged with you, Gentlemen, what is the tendency, what must be the effect of the statutes that exist with respect

spect to Dissenters, when the execution of them is apprehended. Their lying dormant, to whatever cause it is owing, does not alter their real nature. The genuine consequence of such restraints and laws is, that the attention of the human mind is diverted from the revelation of God to the institutions of the magistrate ; and Religion rests not on the sole authority of the divine Being, but on the votes of earthly legislators. The laws of Christ were purely divine and spiritual, relating chiefly to the inward temper and the state of the mind towards the Father of Spirits : but here the laws enacted relate only to rites and ceremonies, or an outward profession, agreeable to the dictates of Men. In the kingdom of Christ the reason and judgment of men are addressed, but in this case their interest, the love of gain, and the fear of calamity, are worked upon ; the motives and sanctions employed are derived only from what this world can offer, or inflict. Ease and advancement in the present state, instead of a future, unseen

unseen inheritance in heaven, becomes the aim of the soul. Jesus discouraged, but human laws, in favour of religion, inflame and cherish the hope of secular greatness, or earthly prosperity. According to the Gospel, religion is to render the tribute of homage and gratitude due to our heavenly Father: but, in this case, it degenerates into a way of obtaining ease and security, into a compliance with the will and opinions of Men. The force of Christ's sanctions is unspeakably weakened, inasmuch as others of an opposite kind are employed. In short, religion is placed on a different footing, is directed to different objects, is animated by different aims, and, contrary to the nature of Christ's kingdom, becomes a thing of this world. This is the genius and influence of the laws, the repeal of which we have solicited.

Have not such statutes then an unhappy and hurtful influence, an influence repugnant to the spirit of genuine religion: instead of assisting piety, they *destroy* it; instead of cherishing the sacred flame of
zeal

zeal for God and truth, they *quench* it. Were the edicts in being against Dissenting Ministers executed, what advantages would religion receive from it? Would the darkness of a prison throw such light around us, that we should immediately see the truth of the Articles of the Church, and the beauties of her Worship? Would fines win us over to the love of her constitution? Would an exclusion from the towns where our most valuable and dearest connections lie, invite us into her communion? Whatever obedience these laws might procure, it would be extorted by force; and whatever conformity they might produce, it would be that of hypocrites. And can any laws, that restrain or limit religion, be mentioned, that are not in their nature like these, inconsistent with the spirit of genuine piety, and in their effects as truly, if not equally, destructive of the rights of humanity, and useless for obtaining the ends for which they were framed? Does wisdom then dictate the continuance of laws, that defeat the end they

they are designed to answer? or, does a concern for the interests of religion urge the perpetuity of edicts, that are opposite to its spirit and genius? No, wisdom and piety both plead for the repeal of such laws; and that every man be left to think freely, and without awe, or restraint, profess his sentiments.

I have the pleasure to think and speak here with the learned Bishop of Oxford, and cannot deny myself the satisfaction of quoting an excellent passage from him; as it will set this point in rather a different, but striking light. “ It is of
 “ the utmost importance to the cause of
 “ true religion, that it be *submitted to*
 “ *an open and impartial examination*;
 “ that every disquisition concerning it
 “ be allowed its full course; that even
 “ the *malice of its enemies should have full*
 “ *scope, and try its utmost strength of ar-*
 “ *gument against it.* Let no man be
 “ alarmed at the attempt of Atheists, of
 “ Infidels; let them produce their
 “ cause; let them bring forth their
 “ strong reasons, to their own confusion:
 “ afford

“ afford them not the *advantage* of *re-*
 “ *straint*, the only advantage which
 “ their cause admits of ; let them not
 “ boast the false credit of supposed ar-
 “ guments and pretended demonstra-
 “ tions, which they are *forced* to *sup-*
 “ *press*.——Let no one lightly entertain
 “ suspicions of *any serious* proposal for
 “ the advancement of religious know-
 “ ledge ; nor out of unreasonable preju-
 “ dice endeavour to obstruct any en-
 “ quiry, that professes to aim at the
 “ farther illustration of the great Scheme
 “ of the Gospel in general, or the *re-*
 “ *moval of any error in any part*, in
 “ *faith*, in *doctrine*, in *practice*, or in
 “ worship. An opinion is not therefore
 “ *false*, because it contradicts *received*
 “ *notions* : but whether *true*, or *false*,
 “ let it be *submitted to a fair examina-*
 “ *tion* ; TRUTH must in the end be a
 “ GAINER by it, and appear with the
 “ greater evidence. Where freedom
 “ of enquiry is maintained under the
 “ direction of the sincere word of God,
 “ falsehood may, perhaps, triumph for

“ a day, but to-morrow truth will cer-
 “ tainly prevail, and every succeeding
 “ day will confirm her superiority *.”

This is ingenuously to own that penal laws and restraints are hurtful and inexpedient. And this is confirmed by the history of the Christian Church, and of the pagan world. The union of religion with the state amongst the heathens, maintained, in more enlightened times, the continued use of the superstitions and idolatries of former ages †: and the establishments of Paganism over-ruled the tendency, and obstructed the influence of the wiser, purer and more use-

* Dr. (now Bp.) Lowth's Sermon, at the Visitation of the Bishop of Durham, July 25, 1758. *Monthly Review for October*, 1758, p. 415.

† “ The established religion of the Romans was
 “ no other than an engine of state, which could not
 “ be shaken without the utmost danger, or rather
 “ perhaps without the total subversion of their civil
 “ government. Accordingly we find them strongly
 “ inculcating a tenacious observance of all its rites :
 “ Majorum instituta tueri (says Cicero) sacris
 “ cæremoniisque retinendis, sapientis est.” *Mel-*
 “ *moth's Pliny*, Vol. II. p. 676, the note.

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ful

ful doctrine taught by the philosophers. This could do but little to reform the people, for the law of the country was against them.

But it is not one of the least evils attending the forming of such laws, that their *very existence gives them a perpetuity*. Like those of the Medes and Persians, the laws, relative to religion in all countries, and in these free and enlightened lands, alter not. A Presbyter of our church, with great propriety, asks; “ if the Athanasian Creed “ had never been inserted in our Liturgy, would it be now inserted ? “ Whether the *only* pretence for *keeping it there*, is not, because it is there already † ? ” In the case before us, though wisdom, equity, and humanity, protest against them, the laws are not to be abolished ; though the spirit of the times and the sense of mankind urged their repeal ; though the most distin-

† An Attempt to explain the Words, Reason, Faith, &c. p. 245.

guished

guished members of the House of Commons exerted their talents in favour of a repeal ; though a great majority in the Senate voted their repeal ; though some of the Peers, most eminent for learning and eloquence, and in moral worth, were advocates for the repeal ; though the nature and spirit of the Act of Toleration itself was on the side of the repeal ;—Yet they are still to disgrace our statute book ; yet they still exist to shew, that when laws have been once formed, the influence of the most independent characters, of the most consummate abilities, and of the most opposite parties, is not able to annihilate edicts, which it would be a notorious violation of justice, equity, and humanity to execute. They *are*, and therefore they *shall continue* to be. So difficult a matter is it to procure that to be set aside, which the weakness and ignorance, if not iniquity of former ages, hath established. Even the attention that should be paid to tender consciences, the rights of humanity, and the sacred, important nature of religion,

gion, though they urge an alteration and abolition, cannot procure it. That a law is already in being, gives it a duration and security almost as firm, as what it could derive from the irrevocable decrees of fate. Thus the edicts, here referred to, exist, to hold forth a lesson of wisdom and caution to posterity, how they enact laws it may be the work of ages to abrogate; and which, though iniquitous in themselves, may come to be deemed, because they *are* laws, venerable and politic. If statutes, that thus encumber religion, and infringe the rights of conscience, can so maintain their being; when will Christianity be totally rescued from human restraints; when will the Gospel be suffered to display its native beauties, exert its power uncontrouled, and shine forth with its own light and lustre, pure and unclouded?—O! Lord, holy and true, how long?

Considering these things, considering the danger and calamities to which your ministers and the instructors of your offspring

spring have been exposed, by the very existence of such laws against them, you, Gentlemen, will not think it fanatical, if you are called to reflect with generous and devout pleasure on the security and ease, they have *in general* enjoyed. In *general* I say, for there have arisen instances of Dissenting Ministers being nominated to parish offices, from which they were excused only by producing their qualifications; of enquiry being made whether they had subscribed, and of School Masters being prosecuted for keeping school without licence. In different parts of the kingdom, and many times these vexatious prosecutions have been undertaken, or threatned †. A step of this kind had like to have entirely prevented, or at least lessened the usefulness of the learned and excellent Dr. Doddridge. “ For, soon after his settlement at *Northampton*, a prosecution

† See the account of the proceedings of the Deputies and Committee appointed to take care of the civil affairs of the Dissenters. 1768.

“ was commenced against him in the
 “ *ecclesiastical court*, by some dignitaries
 “ of the *Church of England*, for teach-
 “ ing an academy. And the Clergy
 “ seemed determined to carry on the
 “ prosecution with vigour; notwith-
 “ standing many acknowledgments they
 “ made of his *learning* and *modera-*
 “ *tion*, and many compliments they
 “ personally paid him on that account.
 “ And a stop was not put to it before
 “ the express order of *his late Majesty*
 “ forbade the proceedings §.” So that
 the laws against us have not been
 wholly a dead letter; that we have
 not met more commonly and frequently
 with injurious treatment, that they have
 never been in one instance rigorously
 executed, nor displayed all their terrors
 in such a course of time, is to us rather
 a matter of surprize and admiration;
 especially when we reflect what treat-
 ment is, in all cases, to be expected

§ Dr. Doddridge's Life by Mr. Orton, octavo
Edition, p. 251.

from

from the influence of a *party spirit*, and what is to be apprehended when personal prejudices, or the views of interest inflame the spirit of bigotry. We cannot but resolve the security, we have in general actually enjoyed, into the care of a kind and over-ruling Providence; and feel ourselves strongly prompted to adore and praise that Being, who hath all hearts and all times in his hands.

One circumstance most propitious to our religious privileges, and which summons our gratitude, whilst it calms the fears the nature of the laws is so unkindly suited to raise, is the genius of the times in which the divine Providence hath cast our existence. Never were the grounds of liberty, civil and religious, better understood; never was the spirit of liberty more universally diffused. Men of all ranks entertain just sentiments on this subject, and glow with the love of freedom. The lenity of the government is in our favour; but the *spirit* of the times is much more in our favour. This gives us room to hope, that, should a

Ministry arise disposed to draw the sword which hangs over our heads, the people would take the alarm, when they beheld the instrument of destruction wielded, and command its return to the peaceful scabbard. Even under the continuance of the present mild government, our security arises from this quarter. Was it not that sentiments of liberty now are understood, and their reasonableness felt by all, is it probable the laws would long continue a dead letter? To procure the execution of them would gratify the malevolent; the ignorant would not be ashamed of it; and the poor would find their interest in it. A legal protection is denied us. An honourable branch of the legislature indeed has voted their repeal, has voted us a legal security: but the *sacred Body* (one worthy Prelate §, nobly and singularly true to the rights of humanity and the liberty of Christians, excepted) from whom, as by office the guardians of Christian Li-

§ The Bishop of Lincoln.

berty,

berty, we might have expected a ready concurrence and generous votes for us, have voted against us, and stopped short our application in its progress to the throne. In this state our rejoicing is, that reason and humanity are on our side, and we hope a conviction of the justice of our cause, universally prevalent amongst the *Laity*, will be our safeguard. Whilst security is withheld by B—ps, it is granted by the sense of mankind. This is our felicity, a felicity never enjoyed by former ages in so perfect a degree. Our fore-fathers would have been glad to have seen our days, but did not see them. To live when bigotry dares not execute the sentence the laws enact, is a blessing reserved for us by that supreme power, who determines the times before appointed, and the bounds of our habitation. This should enliven our piety, which the enjoyment of liberty (to whatever cause we are indebted for it) gives us an opportunity of exercising according to the dictates of our conscience ; and it should
 animate

animate our attachment to that cause, which mankind applauds, and defends.

Yes, my Brethren, you will allow me to embrace the opportunity of animating your zeal for the Dissenting Interest, and for Liberty, and exhorting you to exert yourselves with vigour in the further prosecution of this point, the legal security of our persons and rights as ministers, or tutors. The quiet we at present enjoy, from the lenity of the government, the connivance of the Bishops and the Clergy—and, above all, from the *Genius of the Age*, furnishes no valid reason against a “ *perfect Toleration*: for this being such as true policy, humanity, and religion dictate, once passed into a law, and that in consequence of a full, free, and accurate discussion of the matter; I say, such a Toleration would be a fence against tyranny, which neither the arts, nor insolence of persecution

* Dr. Stennet's free and dispassionate Account of the Application of the Dissenting Ministers, p. 11.

“ would

“ would easily destroy *.” It is said,
 we are in no danger, as there is no in-
 tention to execute them. “ But it does
 “ not give us the most favourable
 “ opinion of this argument to consider,
 “ that it operates just the contrary way
 “ to all other reasonings. The *direct*
 “ rule of civil politicks is, the more ab-
 “ surd the law, the more reason for re-
 “ pealing it. But the rule of ecclesiastic
 “ politicks runs *inversely*; the more ab-
 “ surd the law, the less reason for re-
 “ pealing it *.” Let indeed this plea
 have all the weight, it is supposed to
 possess : our condition surely is muta-
 ble : the Ministry of future times may
 not have the same just sentiments, or
 good spirit. The opinions of mankind
 undergo a strange revolution in the com-
 pass of a few years. Men change; and
 the times change. It should seem that
 Policy *now* thinks the Terror of of these
 laws of some use : Policy *hereafter* may

* Mauduit's Case of the Dissenting Ministers,
 p. 22, &c.

judge the execution of them still more useful. Generous sentiments for liberty of conscience now prevail, but is this any argument that they will continue to prevail? The free Republics of antiquity became slaves; and the praying times of the Commonwealth and of Cromwell were followed by an age of debauchery, infidelity and scepticism. You will not then regard such reasonings as any bar to the most active endeavours, to procure legal protection to ourselves, and to convey down the blessing of the firmest security human affairs admit, to posterity. The thought that, now, or hereafter, your Ministers, may be impoverished and sent to a gaol is painful to you, and your minds start back from the prospect with generous sympathy. Yet we are actually exposed to these evils: and the only perfect and stable security is refused. Can you here be silent spectators? Does not esteem and friendship for your Ministers engage you to unite with them, as opportunity offers,

fers, in the prosecution of the important object; in which their wishes, their hearts, and desires, have been harmoniously united? With them, as persons more immediately interested in it, did this application originate, and from their subscriptions have the expences of it in a great measure been defrayed. And here peculiar thanks, and peculiar honour, are due to those in the Capital, with whom it began, and by whom it hath been carried on. Posterity will read their names with pleasure, and hold their memory in grateful esteem. It reflects honour also on the general body of Dissenting Ministers through the kingdom; that they have expressed so unanimous an approbation of the design, and have given to the prosecution of it the countenance and weight of their names. Here we have forgotten our different sentiments in religion, and have set an example of harmony, future times may imitate, whilst the present admire. But methinks the honour and
grati-

gratitude, to which this application will entitle them who have contrived, conducted and assisted it, should not be shared only by your Ministers. Indeed honour and thanks do belong to some worthy Gentlemen amongst the Laity : to Him *, who both times made the motion for leave to bring in the Bill ; to Him †, whose pen has shewn him a warm and able advocate for our cause ; to those, who have forwarded the matter by their voluntary and generous subscriptions towards the expence of it ; and to a considerable number, who have laid the merits of the Application before particular Members of the House. These examples should animate you all, Gentlemen, to exert yourselves with spirit in this Cause.

It is *your* Cause, as well as ours. If you value our labours, and improve in knowledge, piety and virtue, under our ministrations ; our security in the dis-

* Sir Henry Houghton. † Mr. Israel Mauduit,

charge

charge of our pastoral functions is a point that nearly concerns you. And so, undoubtedly, is the power of educating your children according to your own sentiments, and in seminaries you can best approve. The enjoyment of your privileges and rights, as Christians and Parents, is inseparable from our ability to appear in the character of Tutors, or of your Monitors in Christ.

In a more general and enlarged view of the affair, the Cause is yours. You will surely deem the cause of religious Liberty, and of Truth, and the extension of Toleration, whoever shall receive the immediate benefit of it, your Cause. The excellency of your principles, upon the reasonableness and equity of which our application has proceeded, invites your countenance and assistance. You cannot but see, and lament the unhappy influence of human laws and restraints upon religion; and feel you not some generous and pious wishes, to have these obstructions to enquiry and true religion

religion removed, urging you on to active endeavours to rescue yourselves and others from an influence so repugnant to the Liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free? You cannot lend your encouragement to this Cause without assisting the establishment of pure Christianity, and without taking a considerable step towards placing religion on its proper basis, the sole authority of God.

The interest of non-conformity to human edicts, and creeds, and institutions in religion, is an interest you need not be ashamed to espouse : nay, when it is considered what have been the religious principles and rites established by men in every age, or country ; principles and rites ridiculous and superstitious, unworthy of God, without any foundation in revelation, and little auspicious to manly piety and the practice of righteousness ; when this is considered, I am almost tempted to say, a sensible and virtuous man has reason to be ashamed of being a CONFORMIST. At least, should you be backward to appear as the Patrons

trons and Advocates of NON-CONFORMITY, when you reflect that herein you will follow the example of a glorious multitude of faithful witnesses ; I mean not, your pious ancestors only, but those worthies, the account of whose zeal and sufferings in this cause stand preserved in the faithful pages of sacred history. What is the BIBLE itself, but an history of NON-CONFORMITY through the different ages of the world, an history of the extraordinary measures and appearances of divine Providence to countenance and support it ? ABRAHAM was a Non-conformist : so were ELIJAH, DANIEL, and the three Worthies that were cast into the fiery furnace. JESUS and his Apostles were Non-conformists, and Dissenters from the Pagan establishments then subsisting, and from the laws and traditions, by which the Jewish religion had been corrupted. What was the calling of ABRAHAM, what were the different dispensations of Moses and Christ, but measures used by heaven itself to counteract the power and influ-

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ence

ence of human institutions in religion, and of the principles and practices superstition had invented, to which custom had lent a sanction, and which authority had established on the ruins of true religion and rational piety? What scenes doth the Book of REVELATION exhibit, but the sufferings, fortitude, and zeal of the Saints, who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus; who have not worn the mark of the beast, and who have kept their garments undefiled? It holds forth their noble pattern, and their future distinguished triumphs and honours. The lustre of such names, this view of the Sacred History incite and call you forth, to stand up on every occasion for Truth, and divine faith. You cannot appear in better company, than in that of the Apostles, Prophets, and Patriarchs: of that holy band, who have been guided to true religion by Moses, and led to the Temple of Truth and glory by Jesus, the faithful witness.

If

If any other attempt should be made, as most probably there will, in what manner you shall assist the design, must be left to your own wisdom to dictate. Yet I may be allowed to refer it to your judgment, whether it would not be a material service, if an Application was to come from the whole body of the Dissenting Laity? Or will it not be in your power, by your influence, or your generous subscriptions, to testify your approbation of our Petition, and your good wishes for its success? Your good sense must determine the way of proceeding. Whilst not merely for the sake of our personal interest, but for the sake of Truth and religious Liberty in general, it is, in my apprehension, a very desirable thing, that you would all, as one man, declare and shew, that you esteem the cause as your own, and that you embark in it as the cause of Christ and of Mankind.

(52)

I have now only to request, that your candor may throw a veil over the imperfections, and excuse the freedom of this Address : and am,

GENTLEMEN,

With great Respect,

Your obedient humble Servant.



LETTER

L E T T E R II.

To the Rev. Mr. ———

Reverend SIR,

I TAKE up my pen, in compliance with your condescending request to have my opinion, on the propriety and lawfulness of making the Declaration proposed by the Dissenting Ministers, in their late Application to Parliament, in the room of the Subscription to the Articles of the Church of England, to which the Toleration Act obliges them. The question appears rather nice and difficult. I therefore enter upon it with great diffidence ; and should scarcely proceed, had I not the fullest persuasion of your candour.

The Declaration runs in these terms :
“ I *A. B.* do declare, as in the presence
“ of Almighty God, that I am a Chri-

“ stian and a Protestant : and that, as
 „ such, I do receive the revelation of the
 “ Will of God, contained in the Scriptures
 “ of the Old and New Testament, as the
 “ rule of my Faith and Practice.” The
 matter of this declaration is such as no
 Christian will dispute, or object to. The
 scruple, which lies on the minds of some
 of our worthy Brethren arises, I ap-
 prehend, only from *the circumstances* of
 making this solemn acknowledgment ;
 the doing it at the *requisition of the magis-
 trate*, and to screen ourselves from pains
 and penalties. This appears to them, to
 infer the acknowledgment of human au-
 thority in matters of religion, and “ set-
 “ ting our seal to that usurpation, which
 “ is in the highest degree criminal, in-
 “ jurious and profane : and this com-
 “ pliance strikes them, as involving in it
 “ the guilt of Treason against their
 “ Lord and Saviour.”

Now it is a point agreed upon by all
 sides, even by those who can conscien-
 tiously comply with, and who vindicate,
 a compliance with this Declaration ;
 that

that on the principles both of natural Equity and of Christianity, “ absolute
 “ Liberty in the affairs of Religion, be-
 “ longs to us as reasonable creatures.”
 “ It is a right essential to our nature ;
 “ that no penal laws should be enacted
 “ which have religion for their object.
 “ All agree, that “ Religion, in every
 “ form of it, in which it is consistent
 “ with the safety of the State, has an
 “ unlimited title to indulgence : that
 “ Liberty of Conscience ought not to be
 “ confined to Christianity ; nor has the
 “ magistrate, properly and strictly, a
 “ right to interpose in religious matters,
 “ so as to lay any restraint, or prescribe
 “ any Test, to those who behave as peace-
 “ able subjects.” The question then is,
 whether making the above Declaration is
 repugnant to these sentiments : whe-
 ther it is an acknowledgment of the
 authority of the Magistrate, in matters
 merely religious, and a departure from
 our avowed and just principles ? As for
 myself, according to my present view of
 the subject, it appears to me, that it is
 not. I do not see that a submission to

the requisitions of a superior, who has us in his power, is always an acknowledgment, or a tacit allowance of his right.—The Confession, in the case before us, seems justified by the examples and precepts of Scripture.—And it is certainly recommended by prudence, and enforced by the necessity of the case.

A compliance with the requisition of the Magistrate is undoubtedly a submission to the authority he claims : but it does not necessarily imply, that we own thereby the authority to be legal, and his claims well founded. I may not find myself in a situation to contest and dispute his right. The obedience I yield, therefore, will only imply, that I find my interest and safety materially connected with a submission to his requirements : not that I approve of these requirements as founded on equity and justice. Some cases may be supposed that will illustrate this. My lot, perhaps, is so unhappily cast, that I live under a government, the spirit of which is tyrannical, and the laws and customs oppressive.

oppressive. My fortune is an object, on which the rapacious tools and ministers of government may fix their greedy eye. On some groundless suspicions, or false accusations, my person is seized, and I am hurried away from friends and connections, and confined in some remote, close, and unknown prison. Here the tortures of the rack are used, or the prospect of an enlargement is offered, to draw from me the discovery of my riches. I give in a detail of my effects, in what they consist, and where they lie. Would this compliance be an acknowledgement of any right, in these agents of an unrighteous state? Would it be an avowal that these proceedings are equitable and just? No: it is not performed as an act of subjection, and duty to reasonable authority, but purely as a prudential surrender of an inferior part of my rights, for the security and liberty of my person, which are things of much greater value.—Another case, which suggests itself here, is that of paying Tithes, and contributing to the support of

of those on whose preaching we cannot attend, consistently with the judgment of our own minds, and our best improvement. Numbers submit to the law, in this respect, whose compliance can by no means be deemed a tacit approbation of it, or an acknowledgement of the Magistrate's right to enact this law. Many submit to it, who in a political view are ready to condemn it, and in a religious one reckon it unjustifiable.—

A third case, which seems to come nearer to the point in hand, is that of registering places for public worship; especially as those who assemble in them, when registered, are not entitled to the benefit of the Toleration Act, if they refuse, when called to it, to take the oaths of supremacy and allegiance, and to abjure Popery. Here the Magistrate lays restraints and limitations upon the exercise of religion, and encumbers the worship of God with his injunctions. Yet is there any one of us, who would esteem a compliance with these a consent to his right of interfering in religion? Is there
any

any one of us, who would dissuade our friends of the Laity, from opening their places of worship under the sanction of a legal protection and security, because the acts by which they procure this protection may be misconstrued, as allowing the Magistrate a legal authority to grant, withhold, or limit, at his pleasure, the liberty of adoring the Almighty, in the social offices of religion, according to the dictates of their consciences? And yet in this he as really assumes a power IN SACRIS, as in affording Toleration to us their Ministers, only on making the Declaration in question *? In these cases my mind can easily separate between a

* Several instances might also be alledged, of a general compliance with the Magistrate's introducing *his Religion*, in a very exceptionable manner, into our *civil* Concerns: Such as the mode of administering Oaths on the Bible, proving Wills in Ecclesiastical Courts; and, above all, the Case of MARRIAGE, that grand line by which our Succession to Property is regulated, which, though a *civil Contract*, is required to be performed as a *religious Ceremony*, and that according to the Rites of the *established Church*.

com-

compliance with authority, and an acknowledgment of the reasonableness and equity of that assumed power. When the Magistrate requires an assent to his Creed, and proposes to our subscription any explanatory articles, as the ground and condition of Toleration, the matter wears, in my apprehension at least, another aspect, and admits not of this defence. For in this case, not only is human power and authority exerted in favour of religion, but the points of faith, to which our assent is required, are human, the mere doctrines of men. Now a person may give his testimony to the divine Mission of Christ, and the authority of the Scriptures, at the requisition of the Magistrate, without acknowledging his right to exact this testimony : because this is to declare and avow his reverent submission to an evidence and authority, independent of and distinct from the Magistrate's ; for on such a foundation these truths rest ; whereas He, the Magistrate, cannot impart to any of his decisions and explanations

tions of the Gospel, a divine evidence and authority. These are solely human, dictated by man's judgment, or founded perhaps on ignorance, and confirmed by no divine attestations, but supported merely by human power and authority. And if they should be agreeable to our views and sentiments about the doctrine of Christ, yet this does not alter their nature ; for our own sense and interpretation of the words of Scripture, and the truths of the Gospel, are equally human. So that to subscribe them at the Magistrate's mandate, is to set him up as a law-giver and master in the Church of Christ, either separately, or in conjunction with ourselves, in contradiction to his express law, and in opposition to him, who is our sole Lawgiver and Master. In this case we profess *only* the Creed of the Magistrate ; we yield to and avow *his authority alone*. Not the Creed given from Heaven, not our allegiance to Christ is professed and declared. Nothing but what is human is yielded to, embraced, and acknowledged. This
seems

seems to make an evident and material difference. Here the acknowledgement of the Magistrate's authority, and of that only, is *intimately united with, and inseparable from*, a compliance with his requisition: but it is not so in the other case.—Upon this footing, I think, we may be vindicated, by pleading that our submission to his requirements, does not, in all instances, suppose our acknowledgement of their being proper and just: nay, in some cases, it cannot have this meaning: and such is the spirit of the Declaration in question, and such are our avowed sentiments on this head, that, I conceive, it ought not *here* to be construed or understood, as inferring any such meaning, or design.

But further, the Scripture Precepts and Examples, to say the least, look much in favour of the Declaration we are considering. The matter of the Declaration seems nothing more than what we are, by the express injunctions of the New Testament, required to make, on any occasion, and without any limitation. It
is

is an avowal of the divine Mission of Jesus Christ, and of his authority and supremacy in his church. It is only an acknowledgement of his sacred character. And this is the grand criterion of our Christian profession, the great article we are commanded to avouch. For, with a particular reference to the case of being summoned before the tribunal of the Magistrate, our Lord says, "Who-
 " soever shall confess me before men,
 " him will I confess before my Father,
 " which is in Heaven." So far from countenancing our reserve and silence, when required by Governors and Kings to give an account of our faith, our divine Master encouraged his Apostles to expect extraordinary assistance, to expect they should be inspired with supernatural wisdom and fortitude, to enable them to reply to the requisition of those in power. "When they deliver you up, take
 " no thought how, or what you shall
 " speak : for it shall be given you in
 " that same hour what you shall speak,"
 Matt. x. 19. The Apostle Peter lays
 it

it down as a general and universal rule ;
 “ Be ready always to give an answer to
 “ every man that asketh you a reason of
 “ the hope that is in you,” 1 Pet. iii.

15. Dr. Benson’s note here is pertinent,
 and á-propos. “ They were to give a
 “ reason *unto every one*, that asked them
 “ for a reason. By which the generality
 “ of Expositors understand the *Magis-*
 “ *trate* ; who (as some alledge) had a
 “ right to call them to an account and
 “ examine them concerning their Reli-
 “ gion. I apprehend that no Magistrate
 “ has any right to call any man to ac-
 “ count for religious sentiments ; no,
 “ nor for religious actions, any further
 “ than such actions interfere with the
 “ peace and welfare of civil society.
 “ But, as the *Heathen* Magistrates were
 “ wont to call the Christians to an ac-
 “ count, whether right or wrong ; I
 “ suppose St. Peter might here include
 “ them ; and that chiefly ; though he
 “ doth not seem to exclude any other
 “ persons, who were desirous to know
 “ upon what Christians founded their
 “ hope.”

“ hope.” These texts, in my apprehension, allow, nay command, us to answer, at the requisition of the Magistrate, upon the grand article of our faith, and the great object of it; without entering into the question of his right, or of the principles and views with which he demands a Declaration of our Faith. It hence becomes our duty, without any limitation of persons or occasions, to avow our belief in Christ’s divine character before men, whenever called upon to do it. For these exhortations run perfectly in a general strain : no cautions are thrown in ; no cases are excepted, which exempt us from an obedience to them, and justify our refusing the declaration of our faith and hope. A refusal here is a violation of an express command. It is to be silent where it is our duty to be frank, explicit and open. It is to be silent, where our reply, if agreeable to the genius and spirit of this precept, would afford a public and determinate testimony to the Lordship of Christ, and would exhibit his

Religion in its true and most honourable light, as a divine scheme, independent of human authority, and furnishing a sole and unerring standard of faith and practice. Whether this Confession will expose us to penalties, or screen us from them, is not the point on which the propriety and duty of it turns. For that we recognize and avow our attachment to our Master and Redeemer, upon all occasions that offer themselves, is a thing in itself reasonable and proper. We are not to be intimidated from it, it is true, by the prospect of a prison, or a cross. But, if by it we can set our faith in a favourable and attractive light, and make it appear that, so far from meriting the displeasure of the higher powers, and calling for the use of the sword to suppress and extirpate it, it deserves their protection and esteem; certainly, in this case, it is still a duty, dictated by our regard for the Gospel, the reception and success of which we ought to have at heart. If danger is not to deter us from it: can the prospect of securing to ourselves

selves the enjoyment of liberty and safety in the profession of Christianity, or in promoting the knowledge of it, be esteemed a reason why we should not do it; because the person, who calls upon us to do it with this design, has in fact no natural right to make our civil peace and liberty depend upon such terms? The *exhortations* before quoted appear to point out the proper answer in such circumstances, as well as in those of suffering and persecution.

From them I would appeal to the *examples* of the New Testament, to the conduct of Christ and of his Apostles. Witness our divine Lord's behaviour towards the High Priest, and Pontius Pilate. Though he was long silent against all accusations, yet when the High Priest adjured him, and examined him on oath, "whether He was the Christ," he replied immediately, "Thou hast said," *i. e.* I am. Matt. xxvi. 63. with Mark xiv. 62. Though He returned no answer to the many questions, which Herod put to him, because this Prince

did not preserve even the external propriety and decorum of his character as a judge, but treated him with insult and contempt, and seemed to have no end in view, but the gratifying his curiosity: yet when Pilate, with the apparent disinterestedness of a judge, who wished to search into the truth, and pass sentence with equity, said unto him, " Art thou
 " a King then ?" Jesus answered,
 " Thou sayest that I am a King. To
 " this end was I born, and for this cause
 " came I into the world, that I should
 " bear witness unto the truth. Every
 " one that is of the Truth heareth my
 " voice;" John xviii. 18. This the
 Apostle files " a good confession;"
 1 Tim. vi. 13. Herein the first
 Preachers of his Religion, who were
 employed to plant his Gospel in the
 world, imitated their Master. They
 were summoned before Magistrates and
 Princes; they were interrogated about
 the power, by which they preached and
 wrought their miracles: they replied;
 they declared and published, on these
 occasions, the leading facts and truths
 of

of Christianity; they avowed the divine Mission and Character of Jesus Christ, and entered into long apologies for their faith and conduct. Thus we hear the Apostle Paul avouching before Felix :
 “ This I confess unto thee, that after the
 “ way they call hereby, so worship I the
 “ God of my Fathers, believing all
 “ things which are written in the law
 “ and the prophets : and have hope to-
 “ wards God, which they themselves
 “ also allow, that there shall be a resur-
 “ rection of the dead, both of the just
 “ and unjust.” Acts xxiv. 14, 15. It is observable, that He suits the stile and tenor of his profession to the accusation, so that it might be an exact contrast to the charge against him ; and he singled out the Articles of his Faith, which bore a perfect agreement with the doctrines his accusers embraced. This answer is very similar to the Declaration we propose, when He avows, that he believed all things written in the law and the prophets. In another place we find him entering into a long vindication of his

own character, and of the Faith He preached, before Agrippa. The History of the New Testament, besides the example of the Author and Finisher of our Faith, furnishes indeed various examples of the Apostles making a ready declaration of their Christian principles, before the tribunal of Princes, and of their answering at the requisition and demand of the Magistrate.

Probably it will be said : “ That
 “ these are not Cases in point. That
 “ the profession made in these instances
 “ was not to secure Liberty to propagate
 “ and teach, as well as profess Chris-
 “ tianity. And that, when our Lord
 “ and his Apostles were summoned be-
 “ fore civil Magistrates, they were ar-
 “ raigned as forming claims, or enter-
 “ taining and spreading opinions, sub-
 “ versive of the prerogative of Cæsar, or
 “ of the publick peace of the commu-
 “ nity. To overthrow this Charge it
 “ was necessary for them to explain the
 “ principles of their Religion, with their
 “ reasons for adopting them ; that the
 “ pacific

“ pacific nature of those principles, and
 “ the propriety of their conduct in en-
 “ deavouring to disseminate them, might
 “ be manifest to all before whom they
 “ had an opportunity of making their
 “ defence.”——But, by way of reply
 to this reasoning, may it not be asked :
 if it were absolutely unlawful to avow
 our Christian principles before a Magis-
 trate, would the Apostles have done it ?
 If it had been a tacit owning of his
 power *in sacris*, would Christ and his
 Apostles have replied at all at his requi-
 sition ? Would not those holy persons,
 who studied to preserve in their conduct
 a consistent adherence to rectitude, have
 contented themselves with merely assert-
 ing their innocence, and appealing to
 their general conduct in proof thereof ?
 Would they not have declared, that they
 were ready in any other place, and at
 any other time, to explain and avow
 their principles, but they could not do
 it then, as it would be a virtual and tacit
 acknowledgment, that the Truth of
 God was subject to the cognizance and

sentence of earthly tribunals? Would they not even have entered their protest, against the propriety and equity of being thus called to an account? Or rather, would they not have been silent? Something of this behaviour, in my apprehension, might have been expected from them. But the fact is, they did neither evade an answer, nor were silent. They scrupled not to make a Declaration of their Faith, at the requisition and demand of the Magistrate. And is not their example here a sanction for us to do the same? The Declaration proposed to be made by us, like that which they made, is also a vindication of our principles; it is a fair exhibition of our peculiar Character as Dissenters, and of our Faith as Christians; It is a justification and apology for our disseminating religious principles and truths, because we hereby own that we endeavour to advance the knowledge and practice of Christianity, and make the BIBLE the rule of our religious sentiments and conduct. This seems a duty we owe to our principles, that

that their excellency may be known and displayed : a duty we owe to the Magistrate, that He may be satisfied He has no reason to apprehend any thing contrary to the good of the community, and the public peace, from our doctrines : A duty we owe to ourselves, that our character may appear in its just light, and not lie exposed to that obloquy, or contempt, which may arise from our principles being concealed ; and that our security may not be infringed, nor our usefulness interrupted, by the groundless suspicions of jealous Governors, and the rash exertion of their power. The avowal of their Christian character was frequently, in the case of the Apostles, followed with imprisonments, penalties, and even death. But it is clear, from the strain and spirit of their Apologies, that they endeavoured to place their Religion in such a light, as might recommend it to the indulgence of the Magistrate, might divert his resentment, and procure his protection and friendship to them. Their vindications, and the reasons

reasons assigned by them of the hope that was in them, were managed with so much caution, address, and respectful deference to the good sense and candor of their judges, as plainly to shew their view was to conciliate the kind regards of the Magistrate, and obtain his protection. What but this, could in particular be the design of the Apostle Paul's Appeal to Cæsar? What, but that He might screen himself more effectually from the malevolence of the Jews, and the partial process of Festus, and that He might enjoy a greater probability of pursuing his Ministry, after having been tried and acquitted at the Tribunal of Cæsar, with security and peace, unmolested and untterrified? Acts xxv. Here then the object the Apostles had in view in their Apologies, and which we seek by our Declaration, is, we see, the same, *viz.* the protection of the Magistrate. They appear to have sought it by owning their principles: We, on the success of our Petition, should have secured it. Their preaching

preaching was against the Law of the State, and repugnant to the Jewish and Pagan Establishments then in being : our preaching likewise, even according to the tenor of the Toleration-Act, and our instructing Youth, are offences against the laws, and deviations from the religious establishment of this Country. They were summoned before the Magistrate under the idea of being Culprits : and we are liable to be treated, as such. In this situation they confessed their Faith, and pleaded in their defence : and we solicit relief, protection, and security ; by offering to say that we are Christians and Protestants, and believe all things written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel. So that, on the whole, our Case appears not far unlike that of the Apostles, and our conduct seems to bear a conformity to their great Example. If, indeed, our lot had been cast under Magistrates, who would forbid us to preach in the name of Christ ; it would become our duty to
say,

lay, as they nobly did, " We ought to
 " obey God, rather than Men." Acts iv.
 19.

So far then, if my views of the matter do not deceive me, the making the Declaration proposed is not an acknowledgement of the Magistrate's right to establish any, or what Religion he pleases: and is no more than is required in some express precepts of the New Testament, and countenanced by the pattern of Christ and his Apostles.—

It will not be difficult to shew, in the next place,

That it is dictated by *Prudence*, and the Nature of our Situation. Considerations of *Prudence*, it is granted, are drawn only from the prospect of interest and security, and the view of advantages to be obtained by ourselves, or our Brethren; and such considerations can never justify, however they may extenuate the guilt of doing what is in itself unlawful, contrary to any dictates of conscience, or any principles of Revelation. Yet, such considerations may be allowed to have
 great

great and deserved weight in determining our conduct, in Cases where the point, about which we hesitate, is not unlawful. Surely then, if necessity presses upon us, and an important point is to be gained, we are at liberty to feel the force of these motives, and to yield to it. This strikes me, as the situation of Dissenting Ministers, with respect to the Declaration proposed. That we should confess Christ is a duty, in all circumstances, and upon all occasions. And if any difficulty or scruple should arise in the mind, when the Magistrate requires this of us, about the propriety of complying with his demand, I flatter myself the preceding remarks will contribute to obviate and remove it. And then, though the Magistrate has no right to make our personal Liberty, in the exercise of our religious profession, depend on this condition; though we may reasonably wish to see Toleration established upon a still more enlarged and liberal bottom; yet our circumstances being what they are, the benefits
to

to be secured by a compliance being so considerable, doth it not become us to submit to the force of these considerations ? We find the Magistrate invested with a power over us, that, if exerted, would be highly oppressive and ruinous ; we find ourselves in a situation, that in some future period may prove very perilous, and at no season can be agreeable to a generous mind : now if we can prevail with the Magistrate to resign, in part, his power, if we can render our situation more easy and secure, certainly these are objects too desirable, to be lightly given up. Even supposing that one out of ten cannot conscientiously make this Declaration, yet if the other nine can comply, and will be placed by it out of the reach of unrighteous laws, and be freed from fear and danger, are not the security and repose of these nine to be sought ; especially when the tenth person will not be brought into a situation more hazardous than that in which he was before ? Even from him whose conscience is so tender, and consequently
more

more susceptible of every humane and benevolent impression, one would expect generous wishes and generous endeavours for the safety of his nine Brethren. He would not have a desire, that their more general benefit should be sacrificed to his scruples.

It appears to me scarcely to admit a debate, whether we shall accept, if we can obtain it, a Toleration upon the footing of a mere profession of Christianity ; a Toleration far more liberal than former times ever knew ; though we cannot procure it upon the consideration of our right to it, as Men. We are not indulged with the least hope of obtaining it without this. What then remains, but that we must either acquiesce in our present situation, and continue to hold our Liberty at the mercy of the Magistrate, at the pleasure of the mercenary Bigot, or on the precarious ground of the Spirit of the Times, instead of possessing it by law, equitable and fixed Law : or that we make a vain resistance to the terms proposed, and
gain

gain nothing, stand out and lose every thing. That such a resistance, such a standing out will be in vain, we are taught and admonished by the intimations we have received from those in power; by the very objections started in both Houses against the present Declaration, as too lax and indeterminate; by the difficulties and obstacles that have arisen against our Application conducted upon this Plan; by the long usage which hath interwoven the power the Magistrate possesses over us into the very constitution; by the improbability, in the nature of things, of obtaining every point at once; by the reluctance, with which men ever part with any power and authority with which time, much more law, hath invested them; and by the propriety of the Magistrate's requiring to know what is the religious profession of his subjects, that he may be on his guard against any that hold a Faith subversive of civil obedience, and dangerous to government: When the Declaration is thus supported, how unhappily scrupulous

pulous shall we be, if we refuse to accept a Toleration upon such terms. Rather prudence and wisdom, as well as necessity urge our compliance here ; where not to comply would only betray our impotence ; and perhaps displease, disgust, and irritate.

If, on the other hand, a legal Toleration is obtained and received upon the condition of making this Declaration, future experience may convince the Magistrate he has lost nothing, neither influence nor esteem, by abolishing those penal fences which had been erected about the particular Schemes and Explanations of Christianity : and he may, by this, be led to reflect that Christianity itself can derive no service from the use of them, nor would he lose any interest, or affection among his subjects, were he to rule upon a still more generous and enlarged plan, and leave all of them, as to religion, secure and free. The Success of our Petition would remove some obstructions, in the way to such an extensive Toleration. It would leave the

G

minds

minds of Men, whether in power or not, more disengaged to study the grounds and principles of religious Liberty. Hitherto, almost all Questions and Reasonings on this subject, have been confined to the case of those who embrace Christianity, but under different forms and various explanations : the Enquiry will then naturally and easily be extended further, to the case of those who are not Christians; new points, not yet so generally attended to, will offer themselves to be considered and investigated. The Right of all Parties of Christians to a full Toleration being seen, owned, and legally settled; that of Jews, Deists, or Mahometans will, of course, be the next object of enquiry *. This may prepare us for,

* The above can scarcely be thought by *any* as going too far, after what even Mr. *Hitchin* hath said : “ I would not have a Socinian persecuted for
 “ denying the Deity, and Atonement of Christ,
 “ any more than I would a Jew for blaspheming
 “ my Messiah, or denying that the true Messiah is
 “ yet come; nor would I dare to use one Mean to
 “ prevent

for, and hasten that happy period, when Christianity, according to its original Genius, and the declaration of its divine Author, will be again A KINGDOM NOT OF THIS WORLD. What generous mind, what Christian does not glow with the enlivening hope? Who would not with vigour contribute to introduce such a happy state of things? Who would not be active in taking any step, that has even a remote tendency hereto? Surely, to seek a legal Security of our Liberty upon the enlarged footing of a profession of Christianity, upon terms that have so agreeable, so happy a tendency, is not "to supplicate for Chains," or to take away all future probability of a free Toleration! This free Toleration, of which some Gentlemen talk now so warmly, and which indeed is highly desirable, by the way, was never attempted, or sought

"prevent their obtaining Liberty to worship their own God, in their own way." Mr. Fell quotes this Declaration with approbation. *Fell's Genuine Protestantism*, p. 45.

after, and scarcely thought of, any further than as a thing in speculation right; till the Application upon the present footing was begun and advanced; so that those Ministers who appear too ready to detract from the merit of the Committee, with some of whom this Affair originated, must be obliged to own that **THEIRS** is the honour of giving birth to the actual Scheme of soliciting for this free Toleration; **THEIRS** the glory of taking the first measures, or any steps in procuring a legal Toleration at all.

But I stop myself;—for where is our wisdom, where is that Love which should unite us all together in harmonious bonds, in invidiously reflecting upon, or unfairly misrepresenting each other's sentiments and conduct? Our unanimity alone can give us weight and influence with the higher powers. Our unanimity is our bulwark. Without this we shall sink into contempt: neither will the Magistrate listen to us, nor Mankind pay us any respect. Oh! that we could always, and more especially,

cially now, be prevailed on to join hearts and hands in every thing conducive to our general benefit, and that each would look not to his own things, but to the things of others, and study and act for the cause at large. I address wise Men, they will judge.

Thus I have, dear Sir, ventured to lay before you, encouraged by your request, my sentiments on the consistency, propriety and lawfulness of making the Declaration proposed, in the late Application to Parliament. How far what I have advanced, carries weight and reason with it, I submit to your candour and judgment. If it can give satisfaction to you, or to any one who may entertain doubts on this head, it will yield great pleasure to

Your humble Servant, &c.

F I N I S.

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